

**Gifted and Talented  
Advisory Committee**

**Annual Report on Gifted and Talented Programs  
of the Fairfax County Public Schools**

**Fairfax County School Board  
Instruction Committee**

**May 2, 2006**

## **Contents**

Introduction.....	3
GTAC Managing Expectations, Communication and Respect Subcommittee Recommendation.....	4
GTAC Special Populations Subcommittee Recommendation.....	6
GTAC Teacher Recruitment Process Subcommittee Recommendation.....	8
Conclusion.....	10
 ATTACHMENT A-GIFTED AND TALENTED ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS AND VOTING RECORD	

## **Introduction**

The Gifted and Talented Advisory Committee (GTAC) is pleased to provide its Annual Report on Gifted and Talented (GT) Programs of the Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS).

It has been an informative year and a tremendous opportunity to work with Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Services, Ann Monday, Director, Office of Elementary Instruction and Library Information Services, Mary Ann Ryan, Director, Office of Middle School Instruction, Linda Whitfield, and Coordinator, GT Programs, Carol Horn who have done an exceptional job in providing requested information. They have also facilitated our efforts to identify and secure subject matter experts who provided input for the subcommittee studies. The GTAC worked cohesively as community members collaborated with FCPS GT teachers, staff, and administrators to address challenging and relevant subjects.

The GTAC considered areas for investigation this year which involved a broad range of topics affecting gifted education. This annual report focuses on these topics/issues:

- Managing Expectations, Communication, and Respect
- Special Populations
- Teacher Recruitment Process

To support the subcommittees' studies, information was gathered through presentations by subject matter experts, staff, and committee members with first-hand knowledge of the programs investigated.

In addition to the focus areas evaluated during monthly GTAC meetings, a number of GTAC members participated and provided input to the Local Plan for the Education of the Gifted to be submitted to the Virginia Department of Education. The GTAC was also pleased to have the opportunity to participate in a focus group conducted by the School Board.

The efforts of the administration to embrace recommendations in pursuit of continuous improvement of FCPS gifted education programs which serve a growing and ever changing student population is genuinely commended and appreciated.

Attachment A lists the committee membership and voting record.

## **GTAC Managing Expectations, Communication, and Respect Subcommittee Recommendation:**

**Develop a framework for constructive, two-way communication to aid schools in promoting a positive climate in GT center schools. The framework would provide a menu of options to allow GT center schools to customize their own program to meet the individual needs of the school. The framework should also address barriers that might prevent positive communication, suggest possible solutions to overcome the challenges, and include models of partnerships that may be useful.**

Schools that host GT centers often face challenges in managing the expectations and communications between parents, teachers, administrators and students in a respectful, mutually cooperative manner. Although all schools must manage issues of climate, their complexity can be heightened in schools with GT centers. The administrators at GT center schools must address the often distinct needs of GT center and general education teachers and students as well as promote respectful interactions between center and non-center students.

Teachers at times may face difficulties balancing their classroom demands and communication with parents. This pressure can be intensified when students enter middle school and teachers have 130 – 150 students.. It can also be emotionally difficult for individuals to assess when a parent is "pushing" and whether a teacher is "pushing away" or avoiding the issue at hand. Parents, teachers, and administrators often need to develop consensus on what "timely," "reasonable," "responsive," and "appropriate" mean to all parties. New teachers may also experience more difficulty in managing parent expectations and communication than their more experienced counterparts.

Respect in GT center schools needs to be intentionally built with committed leadership that seeks to improve communication between all parties. Schools should integrate GT students and foster positive language choices and opportunities for interaction between students without teasing or bullying. Schools can also integrate center populations through team building among teachers and increased awareness of the benefits of this team building among parents.

It is suggested that a framework be formulated by consulting with a panel of principals, parents, and teachers from GT center schools that have successfully promoted integrated communities and positive climates. Based on these discussions, a framework of recommendations for creating and fostering a positive school climate would be developed to help manage these diverse expectations. This may include improved communication, affirmation of advanced academic achievement, stronger peer relationships between GT center and non GT center students, and others. Parent Teacher Associations may also serve as a bridge for better communication.

## **GTAC Special Populations Subcommittee Recommendation:**

**Data should be collected on the performance of all students starting in kindergarten so that all identified gifted students and those who have the potential to be identified as gifted can be provided the access, advocacy, and affirmation they need to achieve at their highest level. Data analogous to the International Baccalaureate (IB) and Advanced Placement (AP) participation and test data that is already being collected for minority students should be provided at all grade levels for students in all special populations who are already identified as gifted or who have the potential to be identified as gifted.**

The subcommittee on special populations focused on students who are either identified as gifted or who have the potential to be identified as gifted and who are also members of one or more of the following four groups of students: special education, economically disadvantaged, ESOL, and/or underrepresented minorities (i.e., Black or Hispanic).

The GTAC has always supported encouraging all high ability students to take accelerated courses. Data provided to the GTAC demonstrate Black and Hispanic students are greatly underrepresented in the number of students both taking IB or AP courses and passing IB and AP end of course examinations, particularly in math and science. To improve identification of gifted students within the four special population groups and to document their success after they are enrolled in gifted programs, the GTAC requests similar enrollment and achievement data be maintained and provided for those populations listed above not only for AP and IB (HL and SL) courses but also for Young Scholars and for all accelerated courses by subject including GT (grades 3-8), 3-6 grade compacted math, secondary level Honors (including 7th grade Algebra) and pre-IB and pre-AP courses.

For students receiving Special Education services and who either are identified as gifted or have the potential to be identified as gifted, FCPS should analyze the current process of identifying these twice-exceptional students. FCPS should also look into the possibility of clustering twice-exceptional students in AP, IB, GT Center and other accelerated courses in order to be able to provide a special education teacher or aide to work with twice-exceptional students in those sections. In addition, FCPS should continue to provide training to GT Center and Honors teachers about educating twice-exceptional students and provide training to regular and special education teachers regarding identification of twice-exceptional students.

All FCPS high school students deserve access to a full range of either AP or IB courses, whichever is best for the individual student. One problem, as stated by the College Board, is that "Some students fear that because AP and honors courses are more demanding than regular courses, taking too many could lead to a lower GPA. Instead, they would rather play it safe and go for easy A's." While the subcommittee discussed possible solutions to encourage more students, especially those in special populations to take more challenging

courses, general consensus was not reached. It is suggested the topic be considered for further study and evaluation.

## **GTAC Teacher Recruitment Process Subcommittee Recommendation:**

**Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) identify a GT Human Resources (HR) specialist whose role is to focus on the recruitment, retention and on-going development of those teachers hired to work within the GT classrooms. The GT HR specialist would establish and maintain a conduit between identified colleges with GT programs, the GT centers with placement needs, and the current population of GT teaching professionals in the FCPS system.**

In an educational environment, the ability to minimize avoidable disruptions and distractions within a classroom is always one of the goals. Certainly, forms of disruption can come when a school system either cannot hire a sufficient number of teachers to support its base of pupils, or when a classroom is faced with replacing a teacher in mid-year. These situations are exacerbated when the classroom environment comprises Gifted and Talented (GT) students. The specific needs of these students require that their teachers possess additional training and experience in order to adequately prepare and present the lesson plans. As a result, the recruitment process for identifying and hiring these teachers needs to be continual, focused, and specialized if it is to be effective. All too often, a GT center program is left with a shortage of the identified and qualified teachers needed to fill its level of GT teaching positions. As such, these students are left without a qualified GT teacher to conduct their classes if a teacher cannot be identified and hired before the beginning of a school year, or if a teacher leaves the position during a school session.

By adding this individual, the following outcomes will be achieved:

- **Reduce** time required to identify qualified GT teaching candidates
- **Minimize** cycle time for new GT hires to be recruited
- **Reduce** turnover by increasing contact with current GT teachers
- **Increase** overall hiring effectiveness and efficiency
- **Enhance** relations with colleges with GT based education programs in order to place student teachers in GT center classrooms
- **Augment** the hiring process for principals with GT centers
- **Maintain** a list of potential candidates for direct placement
- **Diminish** the time required to fill mid-year openings
- **Realize** an improved and consistent learning environment for GT students
- **Develop** pool of candidates from adults who are switching careers

The GT HR Specialist will establish an active relationship with the recruitment and admission offices, career centers, and education department deans and professors for the regional colleges where their GT curriculum is well known. Some suggested colleges include Hampton University, Norfolk State University, University of Virginia, James

Madison University, George Mason University, and the College of William & Mary. Through contact with these institutions, this individual will develop and share a GT employment template that will include critical skill sets provide resume guidance, mentoring, and personnel assessment. Preparation and on-going refinement of this process will come from the advisory input provided by the members of the FCPS school board, the current GT teaching community, school principals, and GT program coordinator.

The role of the GT HR Specialist will also include maintaining working relationships with principals, the GT program coordinator, and the GT center teachers. In this way, FCPS will be better prepared to respond to those centers with open positions, centers where a pending vacancy has been identified, to assist active GT teachers to develop and maintain their on-going training certifications, and to allow new GT teachers and those completing their student teacher training to be linked to experienced GT teachers for mentoring purposes. These contacts will also allow the GT HR Specialist to maintain stronger current contacts with recruitment colleges. In some instances, GT teachers may also be asked to accompany the GT HR Specialist when making recruitment calls on colleges when interviewing for potential teaching candidates.

It is strongly believed that the addition of a GT HR Specialist will provide a much more effective and efficient hiring and retention process, and greatly enhance the educational experience and outcomes for our current GT students.

## Conclusion

The recommendations presented in this report have been developed and refined after extensive discussion and evaluation. Implementation of these proposals can strengthen and improve what is already an outstanding combination of programs to deliver gifted services to the students of Fairfax County.

In summary, the GTAC recommends:

- **Development of a framework for constructive, two-way communication to aid schools in promoting a positive climate. The framework would provide a menu of options to allow schools to customize their own program to meet the individual needs of the school. The framework should also address barriers that might prevent positive communication, suggest possible solutions to overcome the challenges and include models of partnerships that may be useful.**
- **Collection of data on the performance of all students starting in kindergarten so that all identified gifted students and those who have the potential to be identified as gifted can be provided the access, advocacy, and affirmation they need to achieve at their highest level. Data analogous to the IB and AP participation and test data that is already being collected for minority students should be provided at all grade levels for students in special populations who are already identified as gifted or who have the potential to be identified as gifted.**
- **Identify a Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) GT Human Resources (HR) specialist whose role is to focus on the recruitment, retention and on-going development of those teachers hired to work within the GT classrooms. The GT HR specialist would establish and maintain a conduit between identified colleges with GT programs, the GT centers with placements needs, and the current population of GT teaching professionals in the FCPS system.**

GT topics requiring further discussion and evaluation or further action include:

- Continued focus on Managing Expectations, Communications, and Respect (school climate) by ensuring a framework is developed and implemented
- Encourage more students, especially those in special populations, to take more challenging courses including AP/IB
- Extend the focus on teacher recruitment to ensure qualified educators are hired who are reflective of the student enrollment to serve as teachers and role models

GTAC will continue to study topics addressing the evolving challenges of providing gifted services to the increasingly diverse students (socioeconomic, cultural, linguistic, twice exceptional) of Fairfax County Public Schools and will share with the School Board the results of these investigations in its capacity as an advisory committee.